

My name is Dianne Rowland, and I am the owner and licensee of the Moonbi Licensed Post Office (LPO) in New South Wales.

I believe, along with my fellow LPO licensees, Christine Holgate should be reinstated to her position as the CEO of Australia Post. She has had a significant role in improving the business fortunes of all LPOs through the improvements she made to Australia Post. In the event Ms Holgate is not reinstated, someone of a similar calibre who is focussed on growing and improving Australia Post must be engaged to lead the organisation.

I would like to make the following comments to the following Terms of Reference:-

**Point b.** – As is widely known, Ms Holgate gifted watches to four staff as a reward for their work in securing \$225 million in investment for the organisation from banking institutions. The watches were valued about \$5000 each, making for a total value of \$20000 for this bonus. This bonus was not exceptional in either its occurrence or value when compared to other Commonwealth departments and corporations. In the same year the watches were awarded, at least 1500 other Australian Public Services (APS) staff are known to have been awarded bonuses of a similar or larger value. It is routine for APS members to be awarded bonuses, and as such Ms Holgate's actions in awarding the four staff can not be considered as unusual or inappropriate in the APS or Commonwealth government context. The approximately \$78 million in bonuses awarded to NBN Co staff would seem to indicate the payment of large bonuses is nothing unusual in a government owned corporation.

**Point c.** – The actions of the Australia Post board leading up to, and including, the then chairperson's request that Ms Holgate sign an amendment to her contract were inappropriate in the extreme. The board's actions relating to all aspects of this matter have been very disquieting. Given the board was previously aware of the decision to gift the watches, their conduct following the matter coming to light in Senate Estimates was unconscionable. The board appears to have chosen to shift all blame to Ms Holgate in what could only be seen as an effort to protect their own positions. These actions, viewed together, suggest the board is not interested in protecting and promoting the interests of Australia Post. From the perspective of an LPO owner and licensee, the actions of the board have destroyed confidence in them to protect the interests of Australia Post.

**Point f.** – The secret review conducted by Boston Consulting Group on Australia Post has long been rumoured to be the first step in a Federal Government plan to privatisate the Australia Post Group, specifically the parcel business. Privatising Australia Post's parcel business would be devastating for LPO's. This would remove a significant revenue stream and reduce the opportunity for customers to conduct other business while posting or collecting parcels. As Australia Post's letter business continues to shrink, while parcel business continues to increase, privatising the parcel business would make the majority of LPO's financially unsustainable. The increased volume of parcels during the COVID-19 pandemic, and Australia Post's resulting focus on this part of the business, has demonstrated how important this part of the business is to Australia Post and to LPOs

**Point g.** – As indicated in Point f, any further reductions in the services offered by Australia Post will have a significant and detrimental impact on the ongoing viability of LPOs. Ms

Holgate's work with financial institutions was instrumental in ensuring the financial security of the Australia Post Group, and by extension all LPOs. The current range of services offered by LPOs is sufficient for them to continue as viable businesses. The removal of any of the current services would impact the financial viability of the LPO business model. A reduction in services would make many small LPOs financially unviable, forcing them to close and resulting in a further loss of services.

**Point h.** – In many regional, rural, and remote areas LPOs provide more than postal services. For many small communities, the LPO provides banking and government services that are not available anywhere else in the community. This need has become more acute with many banks closing branches in small communities, resulting in residents relying on the local LPO to provide basic banking services. LPOs provide a variety of retail and office products through Australia Post. In many small communities this retail service provides increased local variety, or in some communities is the only outlet for these products. Any reduction of Australia Post's services would have a detrimental effect on LPOs, especially on smaller LPOs servicing rural and remote communities. Many of these communities had experienced a steady reduction in services in recent years. The removal of the local LPO would signal the withdrawal of the last remaining government service in many communities. This would have a devastating impact on already battered small communities.

I believe the following should be done to address the concerns of LPO owners and licensees:-

1. The current board of Australia Post should be removed and replaced with a board focused on growing the business rather than reducing services.
2. Given Australia Post's place as an iconic Australian institution, the board should be selected by a group consisting of members of all political parties. The decision on a new board should not be left to the government alone.
3. The replacement board must include members with experience in retail and customer service, better reflecting this aspect of Australia Post's operations.
4. Christine Holgate be reinstated to her position of CEO.
5. If Ms Holgate is unable or unwilling to return, a person of similar experience should be recruited to the role of CEO. Like Ms Holgate, it is essential any candidate has extensive experience in the retail and customer service realms, rather than banking or logistics.

Contact details:-

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